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SOCIOLOGY OF HEALTH

Undergraduate Course

Diploma of Nursing (three years length)

First Academic Year

First Semester

Part of an Integrated Course of General Nursing and Nursing Theory:
Theory of Nursing, General Nursing, Sociology of Health, Clinical Psychology

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Course Description

Sociology is introduced as a study of human behavior through the understanding of social interaction influenced by social structures. Lay theories on social behavior are by-products of our everyday life. Sociology confirms or not our *taken for granted* assumptions on social life. Two main orientations and their characteristics are considered: scientific (knowledge-centered approach) and practice-oriented sociology (solution-centered approach). The scientific approach follows two main paths: the classical process and the ethnographic approach. The former, imported from natural sciences, is oriented towards generalization; it builds theories of social behavior through a procedure that allows the researcher to generalize her/his findings to the whole population with an emphasis on explanation. The latter interprets social behavior building cultural patterns emerging in specific contexts.

In the 1960s, two North American scholars, Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser, presented a third innovative approach named *grounded theory*. It allows us to systematically develop grounded hypothesis in specific contexts – a generative approach – overcoming the descriptive analysis dominating the ethnographic perspective.

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A solution-centered sociology is not new to the discipline, but only recently has it gained attention as a systematic and complete way to look at social phenomena, distinct from the scientific orientation. It could be classified *clinical* or *applied*, depending on the kind of practical question involved, the degree and style of intervention preferred by the consultant, the prevailing methods and techniques chosen.

Sociology of Health is introduced with a brief historical perspective: sociology *in* medicine, sociology *of* medicine (the “sock role” model of Parsons, the Freidson’s model) and the contemporary constructionist approach. Sociology of Health is intended to be a discipline studying health as a social process based on the definition of the situation given by the actors involved in it. Health is a social construction that the nurse should be able to understand in order to intervene successfully developing cultural sustainable actions.

A short course just be able to provide essential conceptual and methodological elements to assist the student in interpreting the health world with sociological lenses.

Main Topics and Learning Expectations

- The functions covered by *informal work* is a core point of the course: it focuses nursing students’ attention on *people’s work* (Stacey 1988, Strauss 1985, Hughes) i.e., significant others’ and the patient’s own work. The patient is intended as a social actor actively involved in managing her/his condition, from the standpoint of her/his definition of the situation.
- Nurse work is emphasized as a *Personal Social Service work* - a helping profession with traits common to social workers, educators, etc., instead of a set of functions belonging to the health organizations and institutionalized professions with their taken for granted values, norms and images. Nurse work is a *production-consumption process* in which a service is provided and modified by caretaker’s acts. The interaction between the service provider and consumer is a social situation to be understood through a *here and now* perspective: this means that attention is a core quality of the health worker’s skills.
- *Emotional, moral and spiritual work* are basic components and processes of nurse work originated by the nurse-patient interaction in specific social settings.
- *A dynamic community perspective* is assumed as a leading thread of the course. The understanding of the intertwining of formal and informal health work helps to develop a professional strategy that is client-oriented and not organizationally centered. It makes it possible to overcome organizational boundaries and professional barriers, enhancing the role that nursing could play in *care management* and achieving more legitimization as a social-oriented profession. (This perspective puts aside a treatment and prevention approach [medical dominated] in favor of a more appropriate orientation towards health promotion [social oriented]).

Texts (Assigned)

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GIORGINO E. Lecture notes.

ROBERTSON, 1988 *Sociologia* Zanichelli, Bologna Chapters 1 and 6 (originally: 1977 *Sociology*, Worth Publishers).

SCHWARTZ H. and JACOBS J. 1987 *Sociologia Qualitativa* Il Mulino, Bologna Chapters 1 and 2 (originally: 1979 *Qualitative Sociology. A Method to the Madness*, The Free Press).

WALLACE, R.A. and WOLF A. 1985 Verso una nuova teoria delle emozioni in *La teoria sociologica contemporanea* Il Mulino, Bologna (originally: A new social theory of emotion in Wallace R.A. and Wolf *Contemporary Sociological Theory* Prentice Hall Int.).

Teaching Perspective, Goals and Tools

A clinical sociology approach (*grounded training*) is adopted in order to empower students' skills in the following areas:

- Listening to own self
- Listening, observing and questioning others
- Paying attention *here and now* to the caretaker's health definition and her/his social context
- Improving autonomy through individual work
- Improving ability to lead and negotiate through group work
- Improving (qualitative) analytical skills
- Improving written and oral reporting
- Improving public speaking
- Being aware of *compassion work*

There are seven sessions of two hours (14 hours in total), two seminars and three workshops. During the workshops, students will be divided into small groups and a tutor will be available for help.

Course Outline

First Month:

Seminar on health (see below)

First week Introduction. Sociology and its scope (half session)

Second week Types of questions and orientations (scientific versus practical-applied and clinical) half session

Third week Conceptual schemes: structural-functionalism, theories of conflict, interactionism

Fourth week The classic scientific approach, the ethnographic approach. Grounded theory.

Second Month:

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- Fifth week Sociology of health: a brief historical overview
- Sixth week The social construction of health and illness. Formal and informal health work (*people's work*). Nursing work as a *Personal Social Service*
- Seventh week Emerging issues in research: emotional work, moral and spiritual work, comprehension and compassion
- Eighth week Intertwining formal and informal work: the trajectory model by Strauss and Corbin in managing chronic illnesses. A research example: GERHARDT, I. BRIESKORN-ZINKE M. The Normalisation of Hemodialysis at Home in Research Seminar "Body and Mind" (see below)

Seminar on Health (middle of Third Month)

Morning session:

1. Individual assignment: Defining your own concept of well-being through the self-administration of a questionnaire (extracted from EWLES and SIMNETT 1985)
2. Group assignment: Small group discussion of individual definitions of well-being. Groups are expected to compare each definition and make a synthesis to be presented in the plenary session by the referees of the different groups.

Afternoon session (Seminar): lectures held by teachers of General Nursing and Sociology of Health. Open discussion.

Seminar "Body and Mind" (middle of Third Month)

Morning sessions only

Lectures held by teachers of Nursing Theory, experts in Complementary Medicine and Sociology of Health.

Sociology of Health (E. Giorgino): Body work and compassion: Zen meditation from a sociological perspective.

Nursing Theory and Complementary Medicine: the art of massage, psycho-motor intervention.

Workshops "Body and Mind:" Zen meditation and compassion (end of Fourth Month)

Two-hour session for each group (of around 30 students) will be spent with a Zen monk. This form of knowledge starts from your body and is related to the emotional-moral-spiritual understanding. The experience of meditation is intended to join the cognitive understanding with emotional, moral and spiritual understanding (a compassionate approach).

The position assumed for this kind of meditation is called in Japanese *kekafusa* or *zazen*

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(setting meditation). The body works for your self-construction in professional and human aspects, enhancing your awareness of the potentialities of people's interaction.

Exam (beginning of Fifth Month)

The final exam is based on a twelve-question test (three on Sociology of Health, the rest on General Nursing, Nursing Theory and Clinical Psychology). Individual interviews will be evaluated; the outcome will be added to the test score.

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Further References (recommended)

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